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AUTHOR	Keith, Jeanette
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ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1925, national attention focused on Dayton, Tennessee, where John T. Scopes was on trial for teaching evolution in violation of state law. The Tennessee "monkey trial" symbolized the confrontation of modern, secular, urban America with conservative, religious, rural America. Although urban journalists and social critics scorned on the latter, this book presents the perspective of country people in Tennessee's Upper Cumberland region. Traditionally these people favored low taxes, minimal government services, and local control of institutions such as churches and schools. During the early 20th century, farmers and town folk fought repeated political battles over the meaning and costs of progress and over control of local institutions. These battles frequently centered on the schools, as the state mandated compulsory education, construction of county high schools (to be paid for by county levies), and modern educational practices. Support for the Tennessee Monkey Law allowed the region to unite in affirmation of religious values at a time when it was increasingly divided by politics, economics, school reforms, and changing social mores. The old ways offered security and survival in an uncertain world. Chapters cover Upper Cumberland farm economics in the 1890s; family characteristics, family life (both reality and religious ideals), and community life; religion and churches; Jeffersonian government in action (politics and social order); arrival of the cash economy with the railroads; struggles over road construction; conflict over school reform and local control; reactions to World War I and the draft; persistence, poverty, and politics; and the family, religion, and politics in the 1920s. The chapter on education (chapter 7) includes information on county enrollments, elementary school graduates, educational practices, and literacy. The book contains references in notes, an extensive bibliography, and an index. (SV)

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